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Kosygin Opens a Door

President Johnson has persuaded the Soviet Union at least to discuss the possibility of averting an ap-
pallingly dangerous and costly race by Moscow and Washington to deploy antiballistic missile systems. This news is especially welcome as an antidote to recent Soviet statements that discouraged hopes of negotiating a freeze on A.B.M. development.

It is true that Premier Kosygin has responded cautiously to the President's proposal for discussions about heading off what would be a major escalation of the competition in weapons of mass destruction. But his willingness to discuss "means of limiting the arms race in offensive and defensive nuclear missiles" does represent an advance from the Soviet leader's remarks on the subject at a London news conference last month.

He then implied that nuclear defense systems did not increase international tensions and that the limited Soviet A.B.M. deployment around Moscow was "not a factor in the arms race." Other Soviet commentators had previously rejected Mr. Johnson's argument that the United States and Russia have a common interest in curbing an A.B.M. contest, as well as in disarmament in general.

Yet that common interest is surely as evident as it was in the nuclear test-ban treaty of 1963 or in the pact concluded at the United Nations last year to bar weapons of mass destruction from outer space. The first casualty of an all-out Russian-American race to build A.B.M. systems would be the slowly evolving *détente* that produced those two treaties and that has now brought the two governments close to accord on a nuclear nonproliferation pact.

Such a race would revive the cold war at its worst and freeze East-West relations for years. Only the bellicose Chinese Communist regime could possibly benefit from this ominous development. And the

supreme irony is that the systems costing each country perhaps \$60 billion probably would add little to either's actual defense capability over the long run, and certainly would increase, rather than diminish, the chance of nuclear war. Time is running out for an agreement to halt this menacing spiral to the atomic arms race.

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